United Nations S/PV.4995

Security Council

Fifty-ninth year

Provisional

4995th meeting

Wednesday, 23 June 2004, 10 a.m.

New York

President	Mr. Baja	(Philippines)
Members	Algeria	Mr. Baali
	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	Benin	Mr. Zinsou
	Brazil	Mr. Sardenberg
	Chile	Mr. Muñoz
	China	Mr. Wang Guangya
	France	Mr. Duclos
	Germany	Mr. Pleuger
	Pakistan	Mr. Khalid
	Romania	Mr. Dumitru
	Russian Federation	Mr. Konuzin
	Spain	Mr. Yáñez-Barnuevo
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Thomson
	United States of America	Mr. Cunningham

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

04-39997 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation, under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure, to Mr. Kieran Prendergast, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Kieran Prendergast, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Prendergast: Since the Secretariat's last briefing to the Security Council, the situation in the Middle East has remained tense. On the ground, the conflict continues to claim lives, economic conditions worsen, hope for a better future is low, suffering continues — all of which contribute to a climate of despair and extremism.

Bad as it is, the situation could get still worse. At the same time, peace and reconciliation are not beyond reach. The basis, parameters and contours of peace are known to all. The international community stands ready to assist the parties if they themselves show the necessary will. What remains elusive is the readiness of the parties themselves to take the difficult but necessary decisions.

Since the last monthly briefing, 39 Palestinians and 2 Israelis have been killed and 309 Palestinians and 32 Israelis wounded. That brings the total number of casualties since the start of the current crisis in September 2000 to 3,437 Palestinians and 942 Israelis killed, with 33,776 Palestinians and 6,008 Israelis wounded.

The last briefing by the Secretariat took place on 21 May, amid grave concerns over the Israeli incursion into Rafah in the Gaza Strip, which lasted until 24 May. It was only after the briefing that a full picture emerged of the impact that Operation Rainbow had had on the ground.

According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), 167 buildings, housing 379 families or 2,066 people, were destroyed or damaged beyond repair by Israeli forces in what was one of the most destructive operations in the Gaza Strip since September 2000. Since that date, a total of 1,476 structures have been destroyed in Rafah town and refugee camp, affecting almost 15,000 people. In the course of Operation Rainbow, 53 Palestinians were killed. The operation uncovered three tunnels used to smuggle weapons. On 2 and 3 June, Israeli forces, with tanks and bulldozers, again entered Rafah town and camp, demolishing 11 more buildings, 4 of them partially.

During the reporting period, closures continued throughout the West Bank. The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) conducted a number of search-and-arrest operations following security warnings. Curfews were imposed repeatedly in most West Bank Palestinian towns and villages. Bethlehem was declared a closed military zone for almost a week.

Extrajudicial killings also continued through the reporting period. On 23 May, three Palestinians were killed and four were injured when an Israeli helicopter fired a missile at a Palestinian car in Nablus. On 30 May, an Israeli helicopter fired two missiles at a motorcycle in the Zeitoun suburb of Gaza City, killing a senior Hamas leader, his assistant and a third Palestinian, as well as wounding 10 bystanders.

I wish to repeat the Secretary-General's call on the Government of Israel to cease the illegal practice of extrajudicial killings. In light of the toll of Palestinian deaths and injuries and large-scale property destruction resulting from Israeli military operations, it is also necessary to remind the Israeli authorities of their responsibilities under international humanitarian law, as the occupying Power, to protect Palestinian civilians and their property.

Palestinian violence has continued as well. On 22 May, a Palestinian suicide bomber killed himself and injured one IDF soldier, as well as four Palestinians, at the Hamra checkpoint in the West Bank. On 28 May, an IDF officer was killed in the Balata refugee camp

during an Israeli operation there. On 29 May, a Palestinian stabbed and injured an Israeli civilian in the Old City of Jerusalem. During the period, 10 mortars were fired on Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip.

Also during the reporting period, there has been a disturbing increase in attacks against and harassment of United Nations staff and property. In the Jenin refugee camp, during an IDF incursion early on the morning of 20 May, the head of UNRWA's Jenin Camp Reconstruction Project was bound, blindfolded and interrogated by Israeli soldiers for three hours. There have also been troubling incidents of violence near United Nations-run schools. In one incident on 23 May, IDF troops fired at stone-throwers and entered an UNRWA school in the Fawwar camp in the West Bank; four pupils were injured. On 2 June, two 10-year-old Palestinian pupils were injured in their classroom in an UNRWA school in Rafah when they were hit by a bullet. The same day, IDF troops opened fire near a second UNRWA school in the area, causing panic among the students. UNRWA has lodged official protests with the Israeli authorities concerning those incidents.

On 9 June, also in Jenin, armed Palestinians entered UNRWA's offices and opened fire. Luckily there were no injuries. The armed men were camp residents dissatisfied with the donor-funded project to reconstruct demolished homes. UNRWA has protested to the Palestinian Authority over the threats to its staff. This disturbing incident highlights the obligation of the Authority to implement security reform.

Construction of the Israeli barrier continued at a rapid pace in and around Jerusalem. On 8 June, IDF troops bulldozed a car park belonging to Al-Quds University in Abu Dis. On 13 June, the IDF began preparations for the construction of the barrier to the east of the settlement of Ariel. Repeated protests against the far-reaching consequences of such an intrusion deep inside the West Bank have gone unheeded. Confiscation of Palestinian land for the construction of the Israeli barrier and for other purposes has also continued.

During the reporting period, increasing numbers of Palestinians and international peace activists demonstrated against the construction of the barrier, and in some instances, Israeli troops fired tear gas and plastic-coated bullets at the demonstrators, injuring dozens. In Zawiya, in the northern West Bank, clashes have been going on intermittently since 9 June, in the context of Israeli land-levelling operations there.

I am pleased to report the success of the intergovernmental conference in Geneva on the subject of "Meeting the Humanitarian Needs of the Palestine Refugees in the Near East: Building Partnerships in Support of UNRWA", hosted by the Government of Switzerland. The Geneva conference reaffirmed the central role of UNRWA in meeting the humanitarian needs of Palestine refugees until a final political settlement is reached. It recognized the need for donor support to be enhanced, and it endorsed an ambitious five-year plan that would enable UNRWA to transfer assets, not liabilities, when the Agency is eventually called upon to hand over its responsibilities to other actors. With effective follow-up, the conference should help place UNRWA on a stronger political and financial footing.

Let me take this opportunity to state very plainly that reliance on the use of force and violence strengthens extremism on both sides and makes it more difficult to return to the negotiating table so as to achieve the compromises necessary for peace.

Allow me also to repeat that the Quartet's road map, despite failure to move ahead with its implementation, remains the only solution that can truly achieve the national aspirations of both Palestinians and Israelis. The road map sets out specific practical measures leading to an end of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and to the emergence of a viable independent and sovereign Palestinian State, while ensuring that Israelis will live in peace and security.

True, implementation of the road map has stalled. Indeed, it never truly started. But the plan remains a solid map that includes both the road and the destination. It has been stalled so far, but with the international backing it enjoys it can easily be revived if both sides take the political decision to do so. We have repeatedly called on both parties to take the steps needed to make its implementation possible. As you know, our calls for bold and courageous action have gone unheeded. The stalemate continues.

The proposed Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank could help to break the stalemate. On 7 June, the Israeli Government adopted a plan related to this initiative. Under their plan, disengagement would proceed in four stages and

would involve the evacuation of all settlements and military installations in the Gaza Strip as well as the dismantling of four settlements in the northern West Bank, by the end of 2005. First, the isolated Gaza settlements of Morag, Netzarim, and Kfar Darom would be evacuated and next the West Bank settlements of Kadim, Ganim, Sanur and Homesh. Then the remaining Gush Katif settlements would be evacuated, and finally, the northern Gaza settlements of Nissanit, Elei Sinai and Dugit would be dismantled. Another vote by the Israeli cabinet will be necessary before the actual implementation of the plan begins.

Palestinian Prime Minister Abu Allah has stated that the Palestinian Authority welcomes the disengagement plan so long as it is implemented as a part of the road map.

However, if the withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the West Bank is to become a new beginning in the peace process, both sides, Israeli and Palestinian, will have to play a part. Although the initiative is unilateral, its successful application requires cooperation between all parties.

The position of the Quartet and the international community is known to the Council. To state it briefly, there must be a full and complete Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and a transfer of authority and control to the Palestinians if withdrawal is to be recognized as an end of the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip. To be a part of the implementation of the road map, the withdrawal also has to be accompanied by similar steps in the West Bank. These actions would not be a substitute for Israel's compliance with other obligations under the road map, such as the dismantlement of all settlement outposts erected since March 2001 and a move towards a full freeze of settlement activities, nor would they exempt Israel from compliance with its obligations as an occupying Power in accordance with the provisions of international humanitarian law.

The Palestinian Authority, too, has a major role to play in the success of the withdrawal, and this role is contingent on the Palestinian leadership also fulfilling its obligations under the road map. The Palestinian Authority must establish security control in the vacated areas. It must work to make the withdrawal from Gaza an opportunity and a source of optimism for the Palestinian people.

Revitalizing, reorganizing and reforming the Palestinian Authority is not only a Quartet request; it is demanded by the Palestinian people, as expressed by their elected representatives and civil society activists. Those in the international community actively involved in the search for peace should call on President Arafat to act decisively to restore the Authority's credibility.

Among the most urgent tasks, both for the Gaza withdrawal and more generally, is the strengthening of Palestinian institutions and promotion of the rule of law. This includes the genuine empowerment of Prime Minister Qurei and his cabinet, and the unification of the Palestinian security forces into three components under the authority of an empowered interior minister. We continue to await the implementation of these measures.

The involvement of the international community will be crucial to an effective handover in the Gaza Strip. Significant donor support could make the difference between hope and despair among Palestinians in Gaza. Close international involvement in both the political and the security aspects could also make the difference between success and failure. Quartet envoys have been meeting in the region to discuss ways of making withdrawal a success. Security Council guidance and supervision could help the parties to carry out clearly defined tasks. International involvement, however, cannot substitute for the parties effectively working to fulfil their obligations.

Egypt and Jordan can assist this process. Both countries have so far displayed a welcome and commendable leadership. The Egyptian initiative in providing training to Palestinian Authority security forces could greatly improve the chances of the withdrawal being a success. Jordan's Interior Minister has stated that Jordan is ready to offer support to the Palestinian security services in the West Bank in a way similar to that proposed by the Egyptian Government for Gaza. We look forward to continued discussions between the Palestinian Authority and the Governments of Egypt and Jordan on security plans.

The Quartet envoys are meeting in Taba tomorrow to discuss the action plan related to the proposed withdrawals. Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Special Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, is in close

contact with the Government of Egypt regarding its initiative.

I turn now to the situation in southern Lebanon. A number of serious breaches occurred in the past month, which could further destabilize the situation in the area. As mentioned in our last briefing, and indeed several times before, the parties have explicitly stated that they do not wish to see deterioration along the Blue Line. Recent events, however, indicate that further efforts are required from the parties to halt violations that are leading towards that outcome.

The violations of 7 June are revealing in that respect. In the early morning of that day, three rockets were fired by an unidentified group from the Lebanese side towards Israel, close to United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) headquarters in Naqoura. One landed near an Israeli patrol boat, and two others landed in Lebanese territory, in Naqoura. Shortly thereafter, Israeli jets violated Lebanese airspace. Later that evening, a serious violation of Lebanese sovereignty took place when Israeli jets bombed a site in Naameh, just south of Beirut. Israel stated that the bombing of that site, a reported position of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, was in response to the launching of rockets from Lebanese territory earlier that day.

Despite calls by the Secretary-General's Personal Representative for Southern Lebanon on both sides to exercise restraint, the deterioration continued. The following day, Hizbullah launched an attack on IDF positions in the Sheba'a Farms area, wounding one Israeli soldier. Hizbullah claimed that that attack was a direct response to the Israeli air attack the day before. Israel in turn responded with heavy artillery fire, and an exchange of fire between Hizbullah and the IDF ensued for some two hours.

While, fortunately, no fatalities were reported as a result of any of those actions, their escalatory nature is obvious, and they show how isolated events risk creating a chain reaction leading the parties straight into conflict. It is very much in the interest of stability in the region that all parties abstain from action that could lead them down that dangerous and uncertain road.

Israeli air violations of the Blue Line have also continued. On 11 June, 11 such violations were recorded, involving a total of 33 aircraft. On that occasion, there was no retaliatory anti-aircraft fire. However, on 20 June, Hizbullah fired anti-aircraft rounds into Israel, damaging property. The Israeli air force then dropped two bombs on a suspected Hizbullah position. Once again, we call on the Israeli Government to cease such air violations, and we caution the Lebanese Government against permitting firing across the Blue Line.

The situation between Israel and Syria has not changed since the last monthly briefing. It is unfortunate that no progress has been made on this track. The resumption of negotiations between Israel and Syria could greatly improve the political and security environment in the region and contribute to bringing hope back to its peoples. That goal — modest, attainable and in the interest of both parties — remains elusive. We reiterate our calls on Israel and Syria to resume talks aimed at achieving comprehensive peace in the region, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

In conclusion, the events of the past month have demonstrated yet again how desperately the people of the Middle East need a political solution to their long conflict. Israeli military operations in the occupied Palestinian territory cannot provide the real security that would come only from a negotiated settlement. At the same time, the Palestinian Authority must act on its obligations under the road map provisions. Force will achieve neither a viable and independent Palestinian State nor a secure and recognized Israel.

There will be no peace unless all of us — the parties, the region and the wider international community — are ready to play our parts. The rocky road to peace will continue to be fraught with difficulties and a constant danger of breakdowns and setbacks. Those who are waiting for guarantees in order to start moving forward will have to wait for a long time. To choose peace is to choose the difficult road, the road less travelled. But the alternative is a continued long, slow, inevitable descent into a landscape full of violence, hatred and bloodshed.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I should now like to invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.50 a.m.